



PRESS RELEASE
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For Immediate Release

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SINGAPORE MAN INDICTED FOR ILLEGALLY SMUGGLING

HUNDREDS OF PROTECTED REPTILES

Orlando, Florida – On July 30, 2003, a federal grand jury in Orlando, Florida, indicted Lawrence Wee Soon Chye, age 38, for conspiracy to smuggle protected animals, illegal smuggling of protected reptiles into the United States, and false labeling of imported animals. Chye was arrested on June 28, 2003, in Orlando, shortly after his arrival from Singapore. The maximum penalty for each count of the three count indictment is 5 years' imprisonment, a \$250,000 fine, 3 years' supervised release, and a \$100 special assessment.

The indictment alleges that Chye conspired with others to smuggle a variety of animals that are protected under the Endangered Species Act and international law, including Indian Star Tortoises, Fly River Turtles, and Monitor Lizards. According to court documents it is alleged that in January 2003, Chye shipped a package from Singapore containing 198 Fly River Turtles, 25 Indian Star Tortoises, and 3 Monitor Lizards, to a co-

conspirator in Orlando, Florida. The package was labeled as containing magazines and book samples. The package was intercepted in Memphis, Tennessee, examined and inventoried by U.S. Customs agents, then sent along for delivery to Orlando, Florida. Federal law requires that protected animals can be imported only by permit from the country of origin, but this shipment did not include any permit from Singapore. In addition, Federal law requires that packages containing animals be properly labeled and declared for inspection by U.S. Customs or U.S. Fish and Wildlife agents.

The case was investigated by agents from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and the Orange County Sheriff's Office. In addition, authorities in Singapore provided information to the investigating agents in the United States. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Bruce S. Ambrose in the Orlando Division.

_____An indictment is merely a formal charge that a defendant has committed a violation of the federal criminal laws, and every defendant is presumed innocent until, and unless, proven guilty.